

*History of Millinery
in
Wasatch Co*

Wesley
in
Millard

MILLINERY IN EARLY UTAH

Three years after the arrival of the pioneers we read the following in the *Deseret News* of October 16, 1850.

Millinery—Mrs. Gully takes this method to inform her friends and the public generally that she is prepared at all times to make silk and velvet bonnets, and other articles of millinery, she keeps flowers, trimmings, etc., constantly on hand. She will be happy to wait on her friends when called upon, at her residence in the 17th ward.

Hat factories or millinery establishments were built in every town and settlement. Men and women skilled in the art of hat making found ready customers and their shops were busy centers.

GOOD NEWS

To the people of this Territory—The undersigned begs leave to inform the people of this city and neighborhood that he has opened a hat establishment on Emigration Street 2 blocks east of East Temple Street near City Brewery, where he manufactures all kinds of Beaver, Otter, and Rough and Ready Hats, and guarantees them to be of the best material and of the most fashionable styles.

Cash, wood, and all kinds of produce taken in exchange.

Wanted to purchase—Fox and Wolf skins; Merino, Saxony, and Lamb skins.—Nov. 9, 1854.

MAKING HATS IN EARLY DAYS

After the harvest time was over, the women went into the fields and gleaned straws for making hats. They were careful not to waste the heads. Instead they added them to the stacks to be threshed. The straws were then sorted one by one. The finer ones were used for the nicer hats. The coarser ones for work hats. They were soaked in warm water for a few minutes to soften them and make them more pliable for braiding, which process came next. Seven straws were used to make the more common work hats. The finer hats were made of braid having eleven straws to the braid. Sometimes to make an extra fine braid they would split the straws. The braid was then dampened and pressed under a damp cloth or real heavy material. Bed ticking or sacking was used for this purpose. Sometimes, however, the braid was rolled on a flat table with a rolling pin. This was for the purpose of flattening the straw. Then with coarse thread, No 8 for instance, the braid was sewed together in the shape of a hat. The measurements were taken for the person for whom the hat was made.

The straws were colored in the same manner that the yarn and threads were in the process of making cloth. For men's hats, often black straws were braided in with white, thus affording a speckled effect.

The nicer hats were sometimes bleached. This was done to the straws or could be done later to the finished hat. To do this they used a barrel or large covered box in which they placed a pan of hot coals. On these coals they placed brimstone or sulphur to burn. The hats were placed safely in the barrel or box and a lid fastened tightly over the opening. The fumes from the sulphur or brimstone accomplished the bleaching process. They preferred the barrel or box as the hat could be suspended from the top of the barrel and a large quilt could easily be thrown over the top to keep the fumes in.

The hat was then ready for blocking which was done by placing the crown over a smooth block to dry. They often made what is called Leg-horn hats with wide brims.

They used colored straws for brimming, braiding and shaping into flowers. Some were curled on a long needle. Horse hair was also used to trim the hats. It was dyed, braided and made into flowers and sometimes used for the braid of the hat proper.

The straws for braiding the hats were better if selected when the wheat was in the milk just before it ripened, and because the wheat was not good for making flour at this stage, a small patch was often planted for the main purpose of making hats. The heads that were cut from the straws were then used for chicken feed. The straws at this stage of growth were pliable and soft and were much more easily braided than when allowed to get so dry.

MAKING CLOTH HATS

The women also made cloth hats. For the material they preferred heavy denim. They had a pattern for the hats. These consisted of triangle pieces cut out for the crown and one round piece for the brim. The sections of the crown were sewed together and this in turn was sewed to the brim. The brim was usually made of two thicknesses of the cloth with often a thinner piece placed between to serve as padding. Nicer hats were made of thinner material, such as percale. These were of different colors and were also starched to make them stay in shape. They were also quilted.

Flowers were made of a material called at that time book-muslin. It resembled what we now call organdy. Some hats were finished with a band on the outside and a sweat band underneath the edge. Some hats were crocheted from cotton yarn. The brims of the hats were generally stitched many times. Women who made hats in the United Order days were Ann Carling Chamberlain, Liddie K. Young, and Johannah Covington.—*Records of Camp 2, Orderville, Hattie Blackburn.*

THE STRAW STORE

On May 24, 1869, a cooperative Mercantile and Millinery Institution was formed by the Female Relief Society of Weber County. The officers elected were, Mary West, President; Harriet C. Brown, Vice President; Rosaltha C. Canfield, treasurer and secretary, and a board of directors. It started business November 22, 1869, capital stock \$697, since increased to \$1200 (1870). Handsome premises built by donation, opposite the Tithing office. Home manufactured goods largely introduced. Business conducted by Mrs. Harriet Brown and Miss Rose Canfield. Many hats have been made from straw grown in the county, but the grasshoppers had spoiled the rye straw crop. A dividend of 20% was declared November 1, leaving a good margin for contingencies. Unanimously agreed to add dividends to capital stock.

The money for the building and furnishing this store was raised by the Relief Society through the visiting teachers and committees, and the liberality of the Saints; also by making rag carpets, bed quilts and various other articles and by giving dancing parties, tea parties and social entertainments.

"In Mound Fort the Relief Society sustained the cooperative store by taking stock and otherwise supporting it. They gathered, split, braided and

MILLINERY AND DRESSMAKING

Millinery shops also played a prominent part in the commerce of Heber, since nearly all the ladies had been schooled in the old world custom of always wearing a headdress of some kind. Many pioneer women found a place of safety for her bonnet when the wagons were being packed to come to the valley. Some few of these early pioneer hats are still in existence. Resourceful women of the pioneer era also

p167

wove hats of straw, but by the time the railroad came in 1899 they "imported" many of their hats from the outside world.

Earlier, however, all the hats were made right in Heber City. To give a seasonal change to the hats they re-trimmed them.

Mrs. Duncan of the Duncan House sold hats to ladies in a store just south of her hotel, and Mrs. Lovisa Alexander had a two-room shop built south of her residence at 65 S. 1st East. Alice Ryan Jones operated a very successful shop known as the Elite Millinery near her home on First North and Third East for many years. She was also a skilled teacher of her art and taught many girls how to make beautiful hats. Annie Jones Smith was also a talented milliner and worked with Mrs. Jones for many years. She would attend the Paris Millinery School each spring to learn the latest fads and fashions. Mrs. J. W. (Effruezenia) Winterrose was also a professional milliner and dressmaker, and operated a shop at 135 S. Main. Mary Bond and Ruby Murdock Gott also made and sold hats.

In 1912 Mrs. William Byrne of Park City opened a millinery shop at 54 N. Main and then later moved to 4 West Center. Her shop prospered and in 1920 she sold it to Vilate McMillan and Frankie Clift. Miss McMillan became sole operator in 1921 and expanded the business to the leading women's specialty shop in Heber. She purchased property at 136 S. Main in 1943 and established her business as Vilates Shop. She still does her own buying, selling, some of the bookkeeping, window trimming and fitting. For many years Mrs. Rachel Giles and Mrs. Mary B. McMullin did the altering for the shop.

Dressmaking was as important as millinery and most of the early milliners were equally skilled as dressmakers. Alice Ryan Jones was particularly noted for her dressmaking and many of the early brides of the county were clothed in her beautiful creations. She trained many of the best seamstresses in Heber.

For years after the settlement of Heber there was no such thing as a "ready-made" dress. Material was at first spun, and then when yardage became available the women sewed dresses from this material. Some who were most deft with the needle and thread went into business. A few of these included Mrs. Amanda Clift, Isabell Jacobs, Emma West, Rachel A. Giles, Mrs. Sue Goodwin Witt, Mrs. Mary Jensen Moulton and her daughters Millie and Josie, Mrs. Susie W. Giles, Mrs. Lizzie Witt, Lizzie Averett, Sarah Smith and Rhoda Ohlwiler.

Putting together a dress in the pre-sewing machine days was quite an art. Each dress required lining, the seams had to be cat-stitched, stiffening had to be inserted in the skirt, the waist had to be boned to insure a good figure and neatness of course was paramount. The trimming was very elaborate.